

# FACT SHEET: Sediment Pollution – Why is it a Concern?

Mandated by the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) in an effort to improve local water quality, municipalities with current MS4 permits and those municipalities who are required to obtain MS4 Permits in 2018 must reduce sediment pollution to local water bodies by 10 percent between 2018 and 2023.

## ▶ What is Sediment?

Sediment is the loose sand, clay, silt, and other particles that settle at the bottom of a body of water. Sediment comes from soil erosion and from decomposing plants and animals, and can be transported into water bodies by wind and water.

## ▶ Why is Sediment Pollution Harmful to the Environment?

- Sediment accumulations in streams degrade water quality for drinking, wildlife, and recreation.
- Sediment deposits can block stormwater drains and pipes, which increases the potential for flooding.
- Sediment pollution causes cloudy water, which prevents wildlife from seeing potential food sources.
- Murky water harms native vegetation.
- Excessive sediment disrupts the natural food chain by destroying the habitat for the smallest stream organisms, leading to a decline in fish populations.
- Sediment increases the cost of treating drinking water resulting in odor and taste problems.
- Sediment can clog fish gills, reduce their resistance to disease, lower fish growth rates, and negatively affect fish egg and larvae development.
- Nutrients transported by sediment can activate blue-green algae that release toxins and can make swimmers sick.
- Sediment deposits can alter the flow of water and reduce water depth, which makes navigation and recreational use more difficult.

## ▶ What Can You Do?

We should do everything possible to protect and preserve our water quality. We can all make a difference by adopting the following best practices:

- Sweep sidewalks and driveways instead of using a hose.
- Use weed-free mulch when re-seeding bare spots on your lawn, and use straw erosion-control matting to protect bare soils.
- Avoid mowing within 10 to 25 feet from the edge of a stream. This will create a vegetative buffer zone to help filter stormwater runoff that may contain sediment.
- Wash your car at a commercial facility or on your lawn so residue will filter through the soil rather than runoff into the stormwater system.
- Promote environmental education. Help educate people in your community that increased erosion and sedimentation may affect their water quality and can harm animals and their habitats.



## DID YOU KNOW?

- ▶ EPA lists sediment as the most common pollutant in rivers, streams, lakes, and reservoirs.
- ▶ Natural erosion produces nearly 30 percent of the total sediment in the United States and accelerated erosion from land practices accounts for the remaining 70 percent.
- ▶ The most concentrated sediment pollution events are a result of construction activities, including small home-building projects.
- ▶ Sediment reduces the storage capacity of reservoirs, destroys wetland areas, and degrades water quality.

**Notify your local municipality when you see sediment (mud) entering streets or streams near a construction site.**



## WE CAN HELP!

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